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ABSTRACT

This paper is addressed to librarians and information managers who, as one of the many activities they routinely perform, frequently publish information in such formats as newsletters, manuals, brochures, forms, presentations, or reports. It is argued that desktop publishing--a personal computer-based software package used to generate documents of near-typeset quality--is an important tool for the information manager to use in packaging and delivering information to the end-user. Reasons for using desktop publishing are discussed, and a four-step explanation of how desktop publishing works is provided. Several factors that must be considered when implementing a desktop publishing system are outlined, including: (1) equipment selection; (2) software selection; (3) word processing interface; (4) need for graphics; (5) training; and (6) cost. It is suggested that the use of desktop publishing can result in better quality information, an improved image of the information center, new services for users, and an increased contribution to the organization. (CGD)

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Practical Downloading to Desktop Publishing: Enhancing the Delivery of Information

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by Pamela N. Danziger, The Franklin Mint

As librarians and information managers, we may overlook the practical application of desktop publishing in our work. After all, we don't think of ourselves as publishers, but providers of 'raw' information suitable for the end-user to reformat into their documents. Yet don't we on a daily basis act as 'publishers' of information – one who makes something public; one who declares, announces, or proclaims publicly? We reformat the results of downloaded searches for distribution; we write summary reports of market research studies for our end-users; we disseminate various current awareness and clipping services, many of which involve writing and summarizing articles; we distribute new book lists, serials routing lists, and handouts describing center services; we build internal databases of company information.

By these examples we see that publishing information is one of the many activities we routinely perform. As a result, desktop publishing is an important tool for the information manager to use to package and deliver information to the end-user.

What Is Desktop Publishing?

Desktop publishing is a PC-based software package used to generate documents of near-typeset quality. Most desktop publishing systems include a personal computer, a laser printer, a mouse as an input device, and a word processor. Some more sophisticated desktop publishing systems may also include a graphics software package and a scanner for loading pictures or text from paper.

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Desktop publishing allows a typesetting novice to produce outstanding quality publications easily and inexpensively. Desktop, as opposed to word processing, is the technology of choice for producing newsletters, manuals, brochures, forms, presentations, and reports on a PC.

Why Use Desktop?

Desktop publishing is important for the information professional to use whenever the presentation of the information counts – and every time we have an opportunity to communicate with our

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end-users, presentation counts! Desktop publishing improves the appearance of information that generates from the information center. The content may be the same in a memo printed on a dot-matrix printer as in one generated using desktop, but the desktop document reflects sensitivity to the end-user's needs – how he or she will read and use the information provided.

How Desktop Works

Unquestionably, desktop publishing makes the information better suited to the end-user, but it appears to require a substantial amount of extra work to produce. Is all that effort worth it? Without a doubt, especially since it actually requires very little additional work to take a document from a word processor and reformat it using desktop.

A particularly easy, yet effective, desktop application is to reformat a downloaded search. All desktop software packages, from the low-end packages, such as PFS:First Publisher to the full featured high-end packages, such as Aldus Corp.'s PageMaker, can be used to enhance the presentation of a downloaded search. However, the desktop packages that utilize stylesheets – stored document specifications that can be saved and used for many different documents – may be the best suited desktop program for handling downloaded searches.

The stylesheet packages, such as Xerox's Ventura Publisher or GEM Desktop Publisher, format the document through predefined format specifications stored in a stylesheet. The stylesheet contains instructions of how to format named paragraphs or fields in the document. By using a stylesheet program, such as Ventura, with a downloaded file, you can deliver a near-typeset quality report to your end-user with only a few additional steps, as follows:

Step 1: Conduct a search and download the results to an ASCII file. This ASCII file can then be loaded into your word processor to delete unneeded references and to add field labels or tags that will be recognized by the stylesheet.

Step 2: Load the text file into the desktop package and apply one of many different stylesheets that contains the formatting instructions and design attributes of different fields in the document.

Step 3: Assign tags to paragraphs in the text, if not included in the input file, and modify or change any of the design attributes contained in the particular stylesheet being used to suit the needs of the material.

Step 4: Print the document using a laser printer and deliver to your user.

The following is a sample text file downloaded from the *Encyclopedia of Associations* database, File 114 on Dialog, which has been edited using a word processor, so that it includes formatting tags that can be recognized by the desktop publisher. These tags are identified by the special notation, i.e. **@[name of the tag] =**, that precedes the text.

@name = AFRICAN VIOLET SOCIETY OF AMERICA (Gardening) (AVSA)
@address = P.O. Box 3609, Beaumont, TX 77704
@address = (409)839-4725
@address = Nancy Lawrence Office Mgr.
@body text = Founded: 1946. Members: 28,000. Staff: 4. Local Groups: 500. Amateur and commercial African violet growers interested in the propagation and culture of African violets. Publications: African Violet Magazine, 5/year. Convention/Meeting: annual - always April.
@name = AZALEA SOCIETY OF AMERICA (Gardening) (ASA)

When this text file is loaded into desktop, the tags are recognized by the desktop package and the specific formatting guidelines for that paragraph stored in the stylesheet are applied to the text. Once this text is loaded, the tag names will no longer be visible on the screen. The previous text appears as follows in the desktop package:

AFRICAN VIOLET SOCIETY OF AMERICA (Gardening) (AVSA)
P.O. Box 3609, Beaumont, TX 77704
(409)839-4725
Nancy Lawrence Office Mgr.
Founded: 1946. Members: 28,000. Staff: 4. Local Groups: 500. Amateur and commercial African violet growers interested in the propagation and culture of African violets. Publications: African Violet Magazine, 5/year. Convention/Meeting: annual - always April.

AZALEA SOCIETY OF AMERICA (Gardening) (ASA)

The tag names in the stylesheet specify how that paragraph will appear on the screen and in print. For example, the **@name =** tag specifies that the text that follows the tag should be centered on the line, in a bold-faced, 12-point type, and it should be separated from the previous paragraph by two spaces. Changing any attribute that applies to a paragraph, for example, making the **@name =** paragraph left-justified, rather than centered, will change every other paragraph in the document with the same name. This allows for a consistent presentation throughout the document, and even in other documents. Because the formatting

is stored in the stylesheet, not in the document itself, the same stylesheet can be applied to different text files. The result is different documents can have a similar look.

The importance of a unique and recognizable look for the library's documents is clear. In the outside world our organizations spend an enormous effort to develop and trademark their name and logo, so that the company's name and symbol are immediately recognized by its customers. Why should we in the information center be any less concerned about how our work looks when it is communicated to our users?

Getting Started with Desktop

Several issues must be considered when implementing a desktop publishing system, as follows:

1. Equipment Selection

The first decision in selecting a desktop publishing system for the information center is to identify which computer it will run on. Most information managers will plan to add the desktop system onto their existing configuration, as opposed to purchasing a whole new computer system. Additional equipment that is required for a desktop publishing system is minimal – a mouse and a 300 dots-per-inch laser printer. However, while implementing a desktop system, it might be the ideal time to upgrade existing equipment, such as replacing an XT computer with an AT or System/2 machine. Desktop is both memory and storage intensive, so an upgraded system will result in significantly better performance.

2. Software Selection

Once the computer that will be used to operate desktop publishing is identified, software selection is straightforward – either a full-featured IBM- or Apple-based package, or one of the more limited, less expensive packages. To select the package suited to the application, read one or two of the software reviews about the packages under consideration. Next go to the local computer store or the software vendor to see a demonstration.

3. Word Processing Interface

Another consideration when selecting a desktop package is whether the word processor in use in the information center is supported by the particular package. The full-featured packages support most of the popular word processors. But if the center uses a less common word processor or is considering one of the

more limited desktop packages, the word processor and the desktop package may not be compatible.

4. Need for Graphics

If the desktop documents must be illustrated with line drawings or graphs, a presentation graphics package may be required to create the illustrations. A scanner used to digitize line drawings from paper may also be needed.

5. Training

Beginning to use a desktop package is more formidable a task than, for example, learning how to use a word processor, because it has far more capabilities and many more decisions are required to generate a document. It is best to find a class that will teach the fundamentals of operating the package you select. The availability of a training class may well be an important criteria in selecting one software package over another, depending upon your comfort level with learning a package from tutorials and manuals.

6. Cost

Finally, the total cost of the desktop system is an important consideration for implementation. To add desktop capability to an existing PC XT with a 20-megabyte hard disk will cost in the range of $3000 to $5000, depending upon the laser printer selected. A full-featured desktop package, such as Ventura Publisher which retails for about $900, is quite expensive as software packages go, but more limited desktop programs can be purchased for less.

Opportunities Through Desktop Publishing

Desktop publishing allows us as information managers to complete the information cycle for our users – from identifying the need, to finding the information, to analyzing the information, and to packaging and delivering the information. For most centers, the analysis and packaging and delivery steps are the weak link. Their importance should never be overlooked because by providing this level of service, we as information managers can make a substantial contribution to the goals and objectives of our organizations. In conclusion, let's briefly review the opportunities available through desktop publishing.

Better Quality Information

Desktop publishing is a technology that allows us to format the information so it is best suited to the end-user's needs and ultimate use. Carefully formatted and written information can be more quickly read and its message absorbed. Our job as infor-

mation managers is to use our well developed analysis and writing skills to extract the information for the end-user and to deliver the answer in a format that can be quickly and easily understood.

Improved Image

With desktop publishing, not only will the information generated from the center appear better, but the overall image of the center will improve. Since we are judged by the quality of our work product, attention to this detail will have a positive effect upon the way our users view the center and its ability to handle ever more important and challenging information projects.

New Services

With desktop publishing we begin to look at our centers and our work differently – more like information publishing and dissemination centers, than as static repositories for information. Desktop enables us to develop information products that are needed by a wide-range of users, rather than simply responding reactively to each individual's request for information. Opportunities abound for the center to publish information. We find that many different users, both within departments and from different departments, have similar questions or are confronted with similar problems. These shared interests can be the foundation upon which the center designs new information products and services, such as white papers, topical reports, market research studies, newsletters, SDIs, or competitive analyses.

Increased Contribution to the Organization

Ultimately, the success or failure of our libraries and information centers, and our personal success as information managers, rests on the extent to which we contribute to the goals and objectives of our organizations. Being focused on the needs of the organization and designing information products and services that meet those needs is the key to success. Desktop publishing is a well-designed tool for the information manager, as it is a technology that supports the dissemination of information to users throughout the organization. Yet, it is only a tool and its value is derived only from how effectively it is used to solve the problems at hand.